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To increase a student's insight into imaginative works, help him relate his personal experience to the metaphoric structure of literature, and bring him to perceive the value of an educated imagination, the teacher should introduce him to literary analysis and various approaches to literary form. Although a perfect critical system which accommodates all literary works and illustrates their interrelationships is lacking, the teacher can provide the student with four types of literary criticism and demonstrate the value of each to elucidate literature and reveal the workings of the imagination. Literal criticism considers the work of art as an isolated artifact which forms its meaning only through its verbal structure. Descriptive criticism turns to such extensional contexts as social and historical perspectives and autobiographical documentation. Formal criticism is intent on extracting the meaning of a work's total structure and on relating this meaning to typical life in the actual world and to other works in the genre. Myth criticism unifies literature by comparing and relating the dominant patterns and ideas that perpetually recur in human literary criticism. (LH)

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The Growing Edges of Secondary English

Essays by the Experienced Teacher Fellows at the University of Illinois 1966-1967

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LITERARY CRITICISM AND THE IMAGINATION

by JAMES O. LEE

Mr. Lee, who received his bachelor's degree from Haverford College and his M.A.T. from Harvard University, has taught for six years in the Philadelphia area and is presently Language Arts Chairman for the Rose Tree Media School District, Media, Pennsylvania. In this paper he evaluates four types of literary criticism with respect to their effectiveness in illuminating the informing power of the imagination in literature.

INTRODUCTION

In the Middle Ages, the static, hierarchical order of life seemed eternally unchanging and easily discernible. Today the technology of electronics has created a world of constant change and fluidity in which, as T. S. Eliot put it, words and meanings constantly "slip, slide... will not stay in place, will not stay still." In a frantic effort to keep up, the educated person may often feel considerable anxiety about what he knows and doesn't know. In a weaker moment he may wish he could resort to a kind of *Irtnog*, E. B. White's super-digest, which would provide a soothing panacea for his anxiety by reducing all that is new and known to a capsulized one-word summary.

What this means in terms of education is that teachers can no longer (if we ever really could) teach a limited body of knowledge and expect it to be useful to students in solving the problems their generation will face. It means that, if we are to continue to affect the lives of our students after they leave the classroom, we must place priority on the underlying structure and form of our discipline, rather than on its content. For if the student's understanding is to keep pace with constant change, we must provide him with those patterns, conventions, and forms which, so far as we are able to know, will make it possible for him to relate innovation to a continuing and developing framework of theory.

This is not to say that we should teach a pallid, lifeless, structural design whose content, because it is ever in a state of change, is insignificant. It is to say, however, that we must teach the student the fundamental principles of the design if, to use Marshall McLuhan's expressions, he is not going to "march backwards into the future," or "look at the present through a rear-view mirror."

Perhaps, however, the problem in an electronic age will soon cease to be one of keeping up with what is new. McLuhan and Leonard

predict that "a worldwide network of computers will make all of mankind's factual knowledge available to students everywhere in a matter of minutes or seconds." Such a network would free the human memory of its function as a retainer of information. As a result, "new materials may be learned just as were the great myths of past cultures—as fully integrated systems that resonate on several levels and share the qualities of poetry and song." [1]

If this picture of the future is a valid one, then in English, as in the other disciplines, our obligation to teach the process of developing an integrated system of theory cannot be overstressed. Moreover, it is through the study of literature, where we are actually dealing with the great myths of the past and of the present, that such an integrated system of materials can perhaps be most readily discovered and taught. In other words, the study of literature should point to those constructs of the imagination which compose its theoretical framework and which enable the student to constantly relate content to form in such a way that he learns through integration, rather than through fragmentation.

In his "Polemical Introduction" to the *Anatomy of Criticism*, Northrop Frye speaks of the need for a theory of literature which is "logically and scientifically organized," and he subsequently attempts to develop such a theory. But, before considering the designs that literary theory can and does assume, as teachers we must first know what learning objectives such a theory would be instrumental in helping us achieve. We must reconsider our rationale for teaching literature in the first place.

In *A Study of English Programs in Selected High Schools Which Consistently Educate Outstanding Students in English*, Squire and Applebee note that apparently very few of the English departments that were a part of the study had reached a consensus about their purpose in teaching literature. All seemed to agree that literary study "contributes essentially to the education of each student," but a variety of objectives and therefore of approaches were observed to be in operation. When department chairmen were asked to rank objectives, however, the one that was considered most important by the great majority of chairmen was (1) "Student's Development through Literature," and other objectives in descending order of importance were (2) "Student's Ability to Comprehend the Meaning and Development of a Particular Work," (3) "Student's Acquaintance with Literary Tradition," (4) "Student's Aesthetic Response and Appreciation," (5) "Student's Under-

[1] Marshall McLuhan and George B. Leonard, "The Class of 1989," *Look*, XXXI (February 21, 1967), 23–25.

standing of Literature as Art." With reference to the preeminent first objective, however, the authors of the report explain that "regrettably the question offered no insight into the kind of development to which many see literature as contributing." [2]

Most English teachers would probably agree that a more specific explanation of the first objective would say at least in part that literature extends and enriches the student's experience in some way. We might agree that we would be serving our students well if they were taught how to live vicariously through literature so that their lives took on the multiple dimensions that come from living more than one life. But today, when television and the movies are providing so many opportunities for vicarious experiences of a very powerful kind, there is good reason for exploring such beliefs further.

The imaginative appeal to our students of TV and movie screens is being discussed more and more by English teachers and people interested in the mass media. In the *English Journal* of September 1966, Robert Lambert states that "the screen has replaced the printed page as the prime source of information and aesthetic experience for the general student." He believes, therefore, that "probably half our literature instruction should be about movies and television" (p. 770).

In an issue of *Studies in Education,* published by Germantown Friends School, Richard Tyre speaks of the "marquee-umbrella'd, neon-lighted moving picture palace" and reminds us that "however commercialized and ersatz the exotic fairy land atmosphere is, remember that your students have associated it with delight, entertainment, and adventure from infancy." The student is hypnotically attracted to the "larger-than-life, realer-than-life people on the iridescent screen on the raised platform." [3]

The demise of the printed word in the face of multiplying electronic media is certainly one of the most important of the prophetic pronouncements of Marshall McLuhan in *Understanding Media.* McLuhan believes that Gutenberg's invention, which produced the "single, descriptive and narrative plane of the printed word" was largely responsible for creating "fragmented, literate, and visual individualism." He main-

[2] James R. Squire and Roger K. Applebee, *A Study of English Programs in Selected High Schools Which Consistently Educate Outstanding Students in English,* USOE Cooperative Research Project No. 1994 (Champaign, Ill.: University of Illinois, 1966). Published as *High School English Instruction Today: The National Study of High School English Programs* (New York: Appleton-Century-Crofts, 1968). Citations to this work will refer to page numbers in the original project report.

[3] Richard H. Tyre, "An English Classroom with 300 Seats, No Lights and a Popcorn Machine," *Studies in Education,* No. 15 (Philadelphia: Germantown Friends School, Spring 1967), p. 8.

tains that, because books provoke private, detached reflection, they cannot compete with TV, which demands that the viewer become actively involved in the process of creating images out of patterns of electronic dots of light.

Whether or not McLuhan is right in his claim that books as we know them will eventually disappear is a question for speculation. (Of course, books on microfilm to conserve space are another matter and are fast becoming a reality.) However, the translation of the printed word into the forms of various electronic media that demand a variety of sensory involvements is certainly already with us. Teaching machines, tape recorders, multicolored film transparencies, full-length motion pictures, recordings of dramatic readings, and television have become increasingly a part of the English teacher's instructional baggage. All of them can be used as catalysts for involving the student in the instructional process.

The Imaginative Power of Language

In the teaching of literature, none of these aids is of much use if the student does not become involved in the imaginative power of language itself. The words of the oldest classic or the most recent novel may be compellingly presented through electronic media that trigger a variety of sensory involvements, but, unless the student responds to the compelling quality of the words themselves, we might just as well classify these aids as excess baggage. Electronic technology will continue to shrink the world, making all human experience very immediate or readily accessible. Through the imaginative dimensions of its language, literature also continues to function in this way, and as English teachers it is our job to bring students to a recognition of this truth.

Speaking of the power of literature to involve the reader and thereby to extend and enrich his experience, Northrop Frye claims that literary experience "stretches us vertically to the heights and depths of what the human mind can conceive, to what corresponds to the conceptions of heaven and hell in religion." [4] Such "imaginative stretching" or vicarious living results in the education of the imagination; it enables us to construct the framework of a world whose values and ideals are representative of those of humanity as a whole. In other words, through an expanded imagination the student of literature is capable of perceiving those values and ideals which are basic to the imaginative world of lit-

[4] Northrop Frye, *The Educated Imagination* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1964), p. 101.

erature and therefore basic to all human societies. He begins to participate vicariously in the community of the world.

If the importance of literature, then, resides in the structural principles of the imagination on which it is based, it is essential that the literature curriculum be based on a theoretical framework which illuminates the basic constructs of the human imagination.

Critics and teachers must work toward a theory of literature whose structure is an integrated system of such constructs. Or, to use Frye's words, we must "learn the grammar of the imagination which all literature employs." Frye's reason for believing that such a grammar is essential to a liberal education is directly related to the question of the function of literature in an imploding world of electronic technology. He believes that while tradition in any given literary heritage is as important today as it ever was, it is certainly far less exclusive: "the vast shadow of a total human consensus in the imagination is beginning to take shape behind it."[5] This "total human consensus" means that the grammar of the imagination is essentially the same for all people, although the metaphorical or symbolic representation may very well vary: the Chinese poet may speak of a lotus while the Italian poet would speak of a rose, but the imaginative use to which both are put is very much the same.

If the very broad definition of the theory and function of literature that has been outlined above is to be at all significant for the student, then through the teaching of specific works we must lead him to a recognition of the importance of the life of the imagination and of the language through which it is expressed.

Partly becase of poor teaching, students often regard the imaginative dimensions of literature as valuable only insofar as they provide pleasant and entertaining diversions from the worries of their young lives. Of course escape literature as such serves a valuable function, but the student who finds that his daydreaming serves the same function just as well, if not better, remains unconvinced of the unique importance of literature. The poor teaching that provokes such an attitude is often that which views literature as essentially ornamental and peripheral in its relation to life—as providing us with a nice way to spend a quiet evening at home before going out the next morning to do battle with the world again. "Evenings of this kind can be fun and relaxing," the student might say (although how many students enjoy quiet evenings

[5] Northrop Frye, "Elementary Teaching and Elemental Scholarship," *PMLA*, LXXIX (May 1964), 18.

at home?); "but then I really should be spending them studying for College Boards," the conscientious one will add.

In an effort to avoid reducing the study of literature to a kind of dilettantism and in order to put some "teeth" in the subject, there are other teachers who are intent on showing their students that literature is essentially philosophy, morality, sociology, or anthropology made readily digestible through the entertaining media of story and song. The writer has used his imagination to make more vivid his message about the meaning of life, the existence of social causes, or the ethics of human conduct, the class might be told. Consequently, students are sent on a literary treasure hunt in which the metaphorical language of the writer must be stripped away in order to find the moral, meaning, message, or theme that lies hidden beneath the surface of the work.

Such teaching once again asks the student to regard the imagination as serving only a rather ornamental function, although admittedly in this case it might be said to have at least the catalytic importance of initiating the reader's involvement in the "message" of the book. The point to be made here is not, of course, that teaching literary themes is bad, but that there is no immediate and direct relationship between literature and other disciplines and that the poetic rhythms of the imagination can never be adequately translated into the logic of prose.

Writers do have something to say to their readers about what it means to be alive on this earth; indeed, this is usually their primary purpose in writing a novel, play, or poem. But to argue that what they have to say can be reduced to a discursive expression of a formula theme is to assume that imaginative literature is disguised essay-writing which attempts to preach words to live by, or that it is a medium of expression which is to be rationally understood rather than imaginatively experienced. Good literature is primarily metaphorical and, therefore, highly emotive and connotative. It must be analyzed primarily in terms of this metaphorical structure, rather than in terms of any purely cognitive meaning or theme. Of course, no analysis can avoid discussing the poetic essence of a work in prose terms, and an analysis of metaphorical structure offers no assurance that students will have an imaginative experience. But it is only by involving the student in the metaphorical constructs of literature that he can be made to see the value of the educated imagination.

A Theory of Literature

In order to so involve the student, ideally he should be presented with a theory of literature which is "logically and scientifically orga-

nized." This means that the study of literature should have a conceptual framework which can be derived from an inductive examination of many works of literature. It also means that the framework thereby established should theoretically account for each and every novel, play, poem, or whatever. In other words, the critic or teacher must look for those metaphorical conventions of language which, taken as a whole, enable the reader to relate the structural framework of any given work to that of all the others.

The difficulty of building such a theory cannot be overestimated. In the *Anatomy of Criticism* Frye has developed a comprehensive and brilliantly conceived synoptic theory, but he is quick to maintain that the results of his efforts are not definitive and that his theory is, in the last analysis, significant primarily in the way it provides some insights into the structural framework of literature. In fact, Frye warns against the kind of pedantry that can result from complete allegiance to his own or any other theory of criticism. Faced with the Aristotelians, Coleridgians, Freudians, Jungians, Marxists, and others, "the student must either admit the principle of polysemous meaning, or choose one of these groups and then try to prove that all the others are less legitimate. The former is the way of scholarship and leads to the advancement of learning; the latter is the way of pedantry and gives us a wide choice of goals, the most conspicuous today being fantastical learning, or myth criticism, contentious learning, or historical criticism, and delicate learning, or 'new' criticism." [6]

FOUR APPROACHES TO LITERARY CRITICISM

It is not my purpose here, therefore, to suggest that Frye or any other critic or school of criticism has found the keys to the kingdom of literary theory, as significant and as inspirational as the work of some of these critics may be. What shall be attempted here is to show how four different types of criticism can be of great help to the teacher of English who is attempting to teach from sound scholarship, rather than by riding any one hobbyhorse of critical theory. These four types are (1) the literal, (2) the descriptive, (3) the formal, and (4) the mythical or archetypal.

It is important to recognize at the outset that there is no necessary connection between these four types and actual schools of literary criticism. Nor is this article attempting to argue that any one of them is intrinsically better than the others. However, it is possible to assess the

[6] Northrop Frye, *Anatomy of Criticism* (New York: Atheneum, 1966), p. 72.

relative merits of each in terms of its ability to illuminate for our students the imaginative constructs of literature.

Literal Criticism

The first of these four, literal criticism, has in this century been championed by such critics as Ransom, Tate, Brooks, Warren, and Empson. Their so-called "new" criticism stresses the impervious quality of literature; it maintains that poetic art has no relation to nature (all existential reality) but is, instead, a purely verbal entity unto itself. Literary study must be completely divorced from biographical and historical considerations and be concerned only with the inner life of the poem—the verbal texture of images, sound, meter, and rhyme. A poem, then, is literally just a poem; its meaning or sense can never be reduced to an explicit statement or paraphrase. Poetry has intensional meaning only—that which can be derived from a study of the way in which any given word becomes "meaningful" as it relates to other words within a total pattern of interlocking verbal motifs.

With its emphasis on *how* the poem means (to use Ciardi's phrase) rather than on *what* it means, literal criticism stresses the ability of literature to delight through the pleasurable ordering of language. For the literal or "new" critic this pleasure becomes most intense in the reading of poetry, whose verbal structures are tightly knit by recurring imagery and by the irony, paradox, ambiguity, and wit of the language.

While its tight verbal structure makes poetry particularly suitable for this method of analysis, fiction and drama may be studied in a similar manner. Since in literal criticism the *how* is more important than the *what,* the point of view established in a poem, novel, play, or short story is important for a complete understanding of the work. In *Huckleberry Finn,* for example, it is important to recognize that the story is told by Huck as a first-person, objective narrator and that this fact more than any other establishes the ironic and satiric tone of the novel. Since the literal critic is always aware of the way in which recurring images help to create the richness of verbal texture, he would also stress the importance in *Huckleberry Finn* of the land-water symbolism, which is an integral part of almost every episode. As has often been pointed out, other internal structural elements of importance in *Huckleberry Finn* include the cumulative effect of the episodes on Huck personally and the circular pattern of the narrative, which is established by the genteel hypocrisy of St Petersburg at the beginning of the novel and by that of the Phelps farm at the end. These structural elements are an important part of the novel as an artistic whole and as such serve as brief examples

of the emphases peculiar to literal criticism. But, as we shall see, they also point the way to another critical approach.

What are the strengths and weaknesses of the literal approach to critical theory? To what extent can it teach students the metaphorical framework of the human imagination—the "heights and depths of what the human mind can conceive"—and teach it in a way that will enable students to recognize its importance in their own lives?

Certainly the greatest strength of this approach is the stress it places on literary works as self-contained, living entities of metaphorical or symbolic pattern and design. It can help students to see that literature is not simply a reinterpretation of historical and biographical data but that it has its own kind of reality which is revealed through the intellectual and emotional relationships that exist between individual words, sentences, and paragraphs. This approach forces students to develop the immensely important skill of looking at the connotative qualities of language, rather than at its strictly denotative and paraphrasable content. It requires that the teacher constantly send the student back to the work for textual evidence to support his idea of how and what the work is saying.

By emphasizing the imperviousness of poetic art, literal criticism denies sympathy to the student who leans heavily upon the critiques in anthologies, on book jackets, and in the commercial study-guide booklets to provide him with an interpretation that he can then claim as his own. Moreover, by stressing the *how* of literature, it quite rightly focuses on the relationship between form and content. It illuminates, for example, the way in which point of view controls the use of language and the selection of narrative events. Thus in the poem "Richard Cory" we see that it is the relationship between the speaker or speakers (the "we" of the poem) and words like *sole, crown, imperial, pavement,* and *glittered* which is central to the development of poetic meaning.

Taught in this way, literature assumes meaning for the student insofar as the teacher illuminates the highly emotive and intellectual qualities of language and demonstrates how context or point of view establishes a world within a poem, novel, or play which is quite distinct from all other worlds. By so doing, the teacher is predicating literature's existence upon the imagination and, at the same time, is showing why the reader must become imaginatively involved if literature's intensional meanings are to be fully understood and enjoyed.

It is doubtful, however, whether literal criticism will go very far in convincing students that imaginative involvement in literary form is a good thing. They will question the importance of anything which is

seen only as an entity unto itself with little or no immediate relation to themselves or to society as a whole. They will probably ask why they should study a poem whose meaning is entirely private and self-contained and whose principal significance resides in the pleasure obtained from a study of its verbal and structural motifs rather than from what it has to say directly to a sixteen-year-old living in a rather perplexing world. For, while literal criticism may argue well for the importance of aesthetic experience in a very prosaic and commercial world, the argument will probably be lost on the average high school student for whom the results of such criticism will more than likely appear as the most insignificant kind of dilettantism or art for art's sake.

Moreover, by stressing autonomy and imperviousness, literal criticism will probably fail to establish for the student a sense of the interrelatedness of all literature. Because its focus is not on the relationships that exist among a great number of poems as a result of the recurrence in each of them of the same kinds of metaphors or thematic concerns, students may very well fail to see how the reading of any given poem is immeasurably enriched by comparative study. The expansion or stretching of the student's imagination to produce vicarious involvement will be radically foreshortened if the grammar of the imagination seems to him to require the most minute kind of parsing to be fully revealed. What he wants is more immediate and direct involvement—the kind he can readily get from TV and the movies.

Descriptive Criticism

Nevertheless, emphasis on close textual analysis can certainly go a long way toward curing the ills of teaching which is totally biographical and historical. Purely descriptive criticism, which pays no attention to the relationship between form and content and which in its most extreme form makes no distinction between the metaphorical language of the imagination and discursive prose, cannot begin to create a theory of literature which is predicated on the informing power of the imagination. Working by itself, it turns away from image, sound, meter, and rhyme to the extensional contexts of prose and poetry and in the process petrifies language in the past. For the descriptive critic literature may be little more than social or autobiographical documentation.

However, the full story will not have been told unless descriptive criticism is recognized as an indispensable servant of other critical approaches. How, for example, could anyone presume to teach *The Scarlet Letter* before his students were familiar with the historical development of Puritanism? Sir Walter Scott's *Ivanhoe* and Dickens' *A Tale of Two*

Cities are surely better understood by students familiar with Anglo-Norman Britain and the French Revolution, and Milton's "On His Blindness" becomes considerably more meaningful when one realizes that the poet became totally blind at forty-four. As one final example, there can be no doubt that *Huckleberry Finn* becomes more meaningful when a knowledge of the Civil War, Reconstruction, and the southern aristocracy precedes the reading experience.

By completely ignoring historical and biographical contexts, a teacher runs the risk of implying that literature is a gift of the muse—a belief which, while it may contain a strong element of romantic truth, would seem to be the worst kind of fairy tale for today's student (at least until the education of his imagination is fully realized). Most importantly, however, such a teacher runs the risk of implying that literature has no relation to the cultural tradition of which it is a part. To do so is to undermine the student's ability to see the relationship of literature to the values and ideals of a society and its members. As with all grammars, the grammar of the imagination which literature employs is a human creation and exists only insofar as it is developed and employed within the context of the human community. Thus, a critical approach which fails to recognize that books are written by men and women living in the midst of a particular cultural tradition will interfere with the student's ability ever to fully understand the structural principles of literature.

There can be no doubt, therefore, that, in the building of curriculum, provision must be made for the chronological perspective of history. Teachers must be prepared to deal with the tension that exists between unfettered literary form and content which is grounded in the particulars of a specific cultural and literary tradition. Students must find delight in *Huckleberry Finn* as a work of art in which they may imaginatively participate and at the same time understand what Hemingway meant when he said, "All modern American literature comes from one book by Mark Twain called *Huckleberry Finn*."

Yet clearly the descriptive approach can never be used to further the purposes of literal criticism. The former considers the meaning of a novel as being synonymous with the natural objects, people, or ideas it is portraying; it looks for denotative accuracy and in its most extreme form denies the validity of metaphor. Indeed, the naturalism of such authors as Zola and Dreiser comes about as close as literature can to descriptive accuracy and still remain literature. Literal criticism, on the other hand, considers the meaning of a novel as being synonymous with its integrity as a structure of words; it looks for connotative relationships and in its most extreme form denies the validity of all extensional mean-

ing in word definition (for example, the poetry of the Dadaists). Consequently, if the teacher of literature is to find some form of descriptive criticism useful, his approach must overcome the limitations imposed upon literary analysis by literal criticism.

Formal Criticism

While in his analysis the "new" critic will always stay close to the particulars of a poem—the interplay of specific words—it would be difficult for him not to say something about total structure. We have already seen that, when literal criticism talks about the cumulative and circular patterns of the narrative in *Huckleberry Finn,* it is considering elements of total structure. By dealing with recurring imagery, point of view, and verbal textures, patterns, and designs, the "new" critic will in many cases be inevitably led to making certain propositions and generalizations about the overall metaphorical framework of a poem, novel, play, or short story. For him, however, the value of such generalizations will never exceed their usefulness as a way of illuminating the function of particular metaphors. He will never formulate propositions about total structure in an effort to relate the poem being studied to other poems so that workable definitions of genre and conventional thematic motifs may be developed. This is the task of the formal critic.

Frye explains in the *Anatomy* that, while both types of criticism make an analysis of recurring imagery, "the difference is that formal criticism, after attaching the imagery to the central form of the poem, renders an aspect of the form into the propositions of discursive writing" (p. 86). That is, the formal critic is intent on translating into paraphrase the meaning of the poem's total structure; he will, therefore, explain how considerations of the formal qualities of genre and recurring imagery help to establish a thematic understanding of the poem and its relationship to many other poems.

The formal critic begins his analysis with an examination of dominant imagery in order to delineate the formal structure of the work. While the literal or "new" critic will emphasize the specific or particular instances of poetic language, the formal critic will always place his emphasis on the dominant or central images that create the imaginative framework of the work as a whole. Once he has done this, he becomes intent on showing how the metaphorical structure of the work may be thematically paraphrased. Theme is determined by dominant imagery and is shaped by the conventions of genre which are operating within the work.

One of the most important tenets of the formal critic is his belief that literature is an imitation of that which is typical in the real or natural world. Therefore, for him the theme and the imagery out of which it develops will reflect those things which human beings share in common, such as certain beliefs, fears, hopes, dreams, and life processes. Since themes which reflect the typical in human life are to be found everywhere in literature, the formal critic is anxious to show how one work is related to another in terms of their general concern for what it means to be human and, in many cases, in terms of their specific concern for one particular human problem, aspiration, belief, or whatever.

The formal approach to the analysis of Shelley's "Ode to the West Wind" would reveal the central theme as reflecting a common human problem: the existence of death in life and life in death as the speaker recognizes his separation from the life forces and desires to be rejuvenated or reborn. Through a synthesis within him of the creative forces of earth, air, and water, the speaker hopes that once again he may partake of some of the freedom and strength that the west wind possesses. The theme is developed through the cyclical pattern or structure of death and rebirth which underlies the poem and which is created by the dominant and recurring imagery of earth, air, and water. The conventions of the ode (and also of the lyric and epic) help to establish the exalted, highly emotional, and universal level that is sustained throughout. Thus, the analysis of the poem reveals that its theme (which stresses the typical in nature), its context within the conventions of genre, its formal structure, and its imagery are all interrelated.

In *Huckleberry Finn* the formal critic would note a number of thematic threads that are being constantly developed and reinforced throughout the novel. Among these are the questions of good and evil, of religion, of conscience, of aristocracy and kingship, and, perhaps above all, the question of what civilization is and what it means to be civilized. These themes are developed throughout the total narrative structure and must be understood within the context of the novel's first-person point of view and episodic form.

An important question raised by a consideration of the emphases of formal criticism is to what extent this approach recognizes the integrity of literature as an art form which does not depend upon paraphrase for its meaning but which is, at the same time, a reflection of the typical in nature. This question becomes particularly important when we consider the relative strengths and weaknesses of both literal and formal criticism. Frye provides a convincing answer. After discussing the formal approach, he says, "What we have now is a conception of litera-

ture as a body of hypothetical creations which is not necessarily involved in the worlds of truth and fact, nor necessarily withdrawn from them, but which may enter into any kind of relationship to them, ranging from the most to the least explicit." [7]

What is important to understand in this statement is that, while literature often does enter in to some kind of relationship with the extensional world of truth and fact, it nevertheless remains "a body of hypothetical creations" which has its own reality. Seen in this way, literature has a relation to reality which, as Frye says, is "neither direct nor negative, but potential." Consequently, while the literal critic views literature's function as being almost exclusively that of providing delight, the formal critic sees no necessity for choosing between delight and instruction, style and message; he recognizes that in any given work both may be present in some proportion.

Since the formal critic looks for imagery which imitates that which is typical in nature, his approach will fail him only when literature becomes so ironic and paradoxical that its potential relationship to reality cannot be realized in the slightest way. However, except perhaps in the verbal games of Dadaism, such an extreme is rarely if ever encountered. For, indeed, all literature is capable of entering into some kind of relationship with the world of truth and fact while retaining its integrity as a structure of images. This is true regardless of whether we are dealing with explicit allegory as in *The Pilgrim's Progress* and *The Faerie Queene*, where the language of the imagination is very close to discursive statement, or the paradoxical techniques of metaphysical poetry and the complexity of such symbols as Hawthorne's scarlet letter and Melville's white whale, where the language of the imagination is far removed from explicit statement.

At this point we are ready to consider to what extent formal criticism teaches students the grammar of the imagination and to what extent it convinces them of the importance to themselves of being taught such a grammar. The following list of propositions points to the strengths of this approach relative to literal criticism:

(1) Formal criticism, like literal criticism, stresses the importance of metaphorical language as distinct from descriptive language. By so doing it teaches students that literature is primarily imaginative rather than factual.

(2) Formal criticism, like literal criticism, stresses the importance of metaphorical structure. By so doing it teaches students that literature

[7] *Ibid.*, pp. 92-93.

has its own internal consistence and integrity—its own world to be imaginatively entered by the reader—and does not depend upon nature for its existence.

(3) Formal criticism, like literal criticism, stresses recurring imagery. By so doing, it teaches students the deep structure or basic imaginative constructs of individual works.

(4) Formal criticism, unlike literal criticism, stresses recurring imagery in order to focus attention on those thematic ideas which develop out of the imagery. By so doing it teaches students that literature usually enters into some kind of relationship with the natural world of which they are a part and that the extent of this relationship is determined by the structure of images. Because formal criticism illuminates paraphrasable, thematic content which relates to society and all of nature, students are more likely to become imaginatively involved in the literature than they would if the literal approach were used.

(5) Formal criticism, unlike literal criticism, stresses those images which imitate the typical in nature. By so doing it teaches students that literature is concerned with the problems, feelings, ideas, and values of all people and therefore that it has something to say to each of them.

(6) Formal criticism, unlike literal criticism, stresses the interrelatedness of different works of literature by showing that all literature imitates the typical in nature. In this way it teaches students that the reading of one work is enriched by the reading of others.

(7) Formal criticism, unlike literal criticism, stresses the structure of images in order to develop workable definitions of genre. Thus it gives students additional tools for relating form to content and thereby enables them to better understand how in literature content is shaped by the imagination working in certain conventional ways.

(8) Because formal criticism recognizes the relationship of literature to nature and is concerned with thematic meaning, its intentions may be served by descriptive criticism. That is, a knowledge of the historical and biographical context of a work can deepen the students' understanding of theme and its implications. The theme of sin, retribution, and redemption in *The Scarlet Letter* is clarified by a knowledge of the historical development of Puritanism and of Hawthorne's feelings regarding his own Puritan ancestry. Used in this way, descriptive criticism can be very helpful and, as in this case, is often indispensable.

The last proposition is very relevant to the question of how to develop sequence in the literature curriculum. We noted earlier that when literary form freely adapts itself to content which is grounded in the particulars of a specific historical, cultural, and literary tradition, tension

is created. The teaching problem is how to handle this tension so that the student perceives that literature transcends tradition while at the same time it remains a part of it. As we have seen, formal criticism tells us that, in the process of developing its own structure of meaning, metaphorical language also points outward toward the typical in nature. In order to determine what is in fact typical in nature, we need an historical point of view. For example, it is impossible to establish that the theme of sin, retribution, and repentance is a theme typical of a given human society unless examples of it at work are found rooted in the tradition of that society.

Consequently, while a literature curriculum growing out of a formal approach to criticism may be organized by specific genres or themes without disregarding the historical and biographical, it can be argued that a chronological study concentrating on the structural concerns of formal criticism might be even more effective in teaching students the relationship between form and content and between literature and the society of which they are members. This type of chronological study would, then, be serving the best interests of formal criticism.

The above list of propositions argues strongly in favor of formal criticism. Among other things, it points out that this approach to the study of literature reveals those recurring metaphorical constructs out of which individual works develop and which, in many cases, they share in common. By doing this, formal criticism reveals some of the components of the grammar of the imagination. Moreover, the above list also makes it clear that, because formal criticism establishes a potential relationship between literature and reality, students can be led to see the importance of living vicariously with the "hypothetical creations" of the imagination.

Myth Criticism

Whatever weaknesses there may be in using formal criticism to teach literature to students would seem to reside not in what this approach to critical theory attempts to do or in the methods it uses, but in the fact that it does not do all that can be done to delineate the basic constructs of the imagination. What we must look for are those images and metaphors which are basic not just to the structure of one or more poems, novels, or plays but which are to be found in the deep structure of all literature. Northrop Frye and other critics believe that the place to find them is in the archetypes of mythology.

In *A Handbook of Critical Approaches to Literature*, the writers state that the myth critic "is concerned to seek out those mysterious

artifacts built into certain literary forms which elicit, with almost uncanny force, dramatic and universal human reactions." They go on to say that myth criticism deals with the relationship of literature to "some very deep chord" in human nature.[8] The mythic approach to literary theory would seem, then, to be psychologically oriented toward discovering symbolic projections of what might be called a racial or "universal" unconscious. It would appear to be looking for signs in literature of those instincts, anxieties, hopes, and values which the members of a tribe, community, or nation share in common and which manifest themselves in specific human actions and statements. Indeed, "myth is fundamental, the dramatic representation of our deepest instinctual life, of a primary awareness of man in the universe."[9]

But myth criticism is not the same thing as the study of the psychology of motives. The literary critic's interest in this approach often resides in the fact that in the stories of mythology are to be found those metaphors or images of the imagination which, because they constantly recur throughout all of literature, serve to unify and integrate our literary experience. Through constant use, these images become a conventional part of the culture. Therefore, for the literary critic there is no need to postulate any racial unconscious or, for that matter, any particular metaphysical view of man in order to account for their origin. These recurring images which originate in myth are called *archetypes.* Frye and other critics believe that they are the structural principles basic to literature and to the human imagination.

Of course, formal criticism is also very much concerned with recurring images, and in this concern it is one step away from archetypal or myth criticism. The difference is that for the formal critic imagery is significant primarily in the way it imitates the typical in nature, while for the archetypal critic it is important primarily in the way any given image is typical of all similar images within poetic language—that is, within all of literature. For example, the formal critic would point to the relationship between a rose in a poem and all roses in nature. If the poetic rose was functioning as a symbol of earthly love, then he would note the poem's thematic relationship to all forms of earthly love outside of literature. The archetypal critic, however, would point to the relationship between a rose in a poem and all roses in literature, not in nature. If the poetic rose was functioning as a symbol of earthly love in a great many poems, then and only then would its thematic significance be rec-

[8] Wilfred L. Guerin, *et al., A Handbook of Critical Approaches to Literature* (New York: Harper & Row, 1966), p. 116.

[9] *Ibid.*, p. 117.

ognized. When the rose functions thematically, it does not point to any connection between the poem and nature but instead to connections among the poems themselves. For the archetypal critic the more the image recurs—that is, the more conventional it becomes—the greater is its importance in imaginative language as a means of communication; its connotative power increases through repetition.

At first glance this distinction might seem to imply that archetypal criticism, viewing literature as quite imperviously cut off from human society, is as inadequate for our teaching purposes as literal criticism. Actually, however, the opposite is the case. If an image constantly reappears throughout different poems and plays written from classical times to the present, then this is evidence of the importance of it in the imagination of the human race as a means of communicating those feelings and ideas which are important to all people. This means that for the archetypal critic the function of literature is no less than that of communicating through the basic constructs of the imagination ("those mysterious artifacts") the common experience of all human beings.

If, as many critics claim, all metaphorical language is an attempt to assimilate the nonhuman world to the human, then the effort to create this identity involves using those archetypal images which reflect the hopes and anxieties that all human beings have as they try to accommodate the nonhuman world around them. Since mythology brings about this accommodation or assimilation, it is in the great myths of the past that one can find many of the most important archetypes of literature. Myths are stories of total metaphorical identification and as such are capable of stretching the imagination to the heaven of human aspirations and dreams and to the hell of human degradation and fear. They reveal everything from the most apocalyptic to the most demonic.

In the apocalyptic world of Christian biblical mythology, for example, the divine world is the society of the One God; the human world is the society of the One Man; the animal world is the sheepfold of the One Lamb; the vegetable world is the garden or park of the One Tree of Life; and the mineral world is the city of the One Building, Temple, or Stone. In this world it is Christ who unites all these categories in identity: "Christ *is* both the one God and the One Man, the Lamb of God, the tree of life, or vine of which we are the branches, the stone which the builders rejected and the rebuilt temple which is identical with his risen body." [10]

A brief list of metaphorical constructs growing out of the apocalyptic vision might include the Trinity; the society whose members

[10] Frye, *Anatomy*, pp. 141–142.

are of one body; the image of two bodies made "one flesh" by love; the king as the shepherd of his people (pastoral imagery); the rose or lotus as fruits of the tree of life; the green, innocent world of Arcadia; the highway or road of all quest literature; the purifying fire; and the "water of life" which can be the medium of spiritual rebirth. These are metaphors which constantly reappear throughout literature.

Apocalyptic imagery is closely related to the existential heaven of religion; its antithesis corresponds to the religious hell. In the demonic world the human and the nonhuman are once again identified with each other as man rather perversely accommodates the one to the other in the kind of hell on earth portrayed in such works as Orwell's *1984,* Sartre's *No Exit,* Koestler's *Darkness at Noon,* and Dante's *Inferno.* For Frye it is the imagery of cannibalism which metaphorically unites the divine, human, animal, and vegetable in the demonic world. A brief list of metaphorical constructs growing out of the demonic vision might include symbols of an inaccessible sky and inscrutable fate; the sacrificial victim; the cannibal giant or ogre; the sinister dragon or beast; men identified with beasts; heaths, wastelands, and sinister forests; the labyrinth or maze and other images of lost direction; fire-breathing demons; and the leviathan of the water of death.

Frye sees three organizations of myths and archetypal symbols. At one extreme is the pure myth of total metaphorical identification, and at the other is irony and satire or realism. In between is romance, in which mythical patterns are implicit in a world that draws close to human experience. One of Frye's most important claims is that no matter where a particular work may be on the scale from realism to myth, it will always contain some mythical patterns, even though they may have undergone radical displacement from pure myth. Myth pervades all of literature because there can be no product of the human imagination which does not work through the language of metaphor—that is, which does not to a greater or lesser degree attempt to assimilate the nonhuman to the human. This is true, therefore, even of irony and satire, which begin realistically but then usually move toward the archetypal imagery of demonic myth.

Although most of the literature of today certainly does not deal directly with the gods and heroes of antiquity or reflect a civilization which is highly conscious of its relation to the nonhuman, nevertheless it still functions in much the same way as does the mythology of earlier and more primitive societies. Frye argues this point most convincingly in *The Educated Imagination*: "In Shakespeare we can still have heroes who can see ghosts and talk in magnificent poetry, but by

the time we get to Beckett's *Waiting for Godot* they're speaking prose and have turned into ghosts themselves. We have to look at the figures of speech a writer uses, his images and symbols, to realize that underneath all the complexity of human life that uneasy stare at an alien nature is still haunting us, and the problem of surmounting it still with us. Above all, we have to look at the total design of a writer's work, the title he gives to it, and his main theme, which means his point in writing it, to understand that literature is still doing the same job that mythology did earlier, but filling in its huge cloudy shapes with sharper lights and deeper shadows." [11]

Most of the novels, plays, and poems we give our students to read are not, of course, pure mythology. But, as argued above, almost all of what they read contains some of the archetypal images, motifs, or patterns found in pure mythology. This is why Frye believes that the literature curriculum should include a study of classical and biblical mythology early in the program, preferably in the elementary grades. With this as a background, students will be in a good position to perceive how virtually all literature revolves around the mythical archetypes of those early stories. They will be able to see, for example, that "Ode to the West Wind" concerns man's tragic separation from his God and as such is the lost-identity myth of a man who moves from the world of innocence, harmony, and total identity to the demonic world of experience. Desiring to regain his former self-identity, he utters his frustrated cry to God, "O hear!" With the background that Frye recommends, students may begin to realize that this archetypal pattern is one which appears in one form or another in most of Western literature. In fact, Frye maintains that the story of the loss and regaining of identity is the framework of all literature: "Inside it comes the story of the hero with a thousand faces, as one critic calls him, whose adventures, death, disappearance and marriage or resurrection are the focal points of what later became romance and tragedy and satire and comedy in fiction, and the emotional moods that take their place in such forms as the lyric, which normally doesn't tell a story." [12]

It is true that one does not have to look very far to see that stories of innocence and experience abound in the literature many teachers introduce to their students. R. W. B. Lewis' book, *The American Adam*, traces this archetypal motif through the works of such American authors as Hawthorne, Melville, Twain, James, Fitzgerald, Hemingway, Faulkner, Salinger, and Bellow. The American myth is an outgrowth of the

[11] Frye, *The Educated Imagination*, pp. 56–57.
[12] *Ibid.*, p. 55.

biblical one; it is the story of Adam, the Garden, and the Fall. The hero is Adam, who must go through a painful initiation into an awareness of evil and who himself falls out of the timeless world of Edenic innocence into a world of time, experience, and sin. For example, Huck Finn leaves behind the ignorance of his innocence, is initiated into the world of experience through a variety of painful adventures, and eventually emerges morally reborn. It is the mythical cycle of birth, initiation, death, and rebirth. Closely aligned with this myth is that of the American Dream, and many of the writers listed above have also told the story of man's hope of establishing a second Eden, Paradise, or Arcadia here in the New World.

What is important to remember about archetypal motifs is that because they constantly reappear in literature, they establish themselves as constructs of the imagination which are important to both literature and human society. Pastoral myths and myths of the quest for identity and salvation, such as have been illustrated above, as well as hero and sacrificial myths, can be found everywhere—in popular books and magazines, political addresses, advertisements, church sermons, television shows, and movies, for example. In addition, each mythical pattern contains specific archetypal images such as water, sun, moon, wind, fire, circles, birds, trees, garden, desert (or wasteland), colors, the four seasons, etc., which reappear again and again in the language of both literature and society. (Witness the white dove which flies into Trudy Richards' kitchen, or the green, sylvan setting to which the Salem smoker takes his girl.)

These are the images and patterns which, as archetypes, constitute the underlying structure of the grammar of the imagination. A literature curriculum which is sequentially designed to reveal this grammar would hope to illustrate for the student the structure of his own imagination while at the same time stretching or educating it in a manner that would put him vicariously in touch with the dreams, aspirations, frustrations, and ideals that all men share at one time or another. Archetypal criticism can demonstrate how myths are structures which integrate rather than fragment experience. It can lead students to see that one way in which man can and does find meaning in life is by discovering some means of becoming mythically integrated with the world and ultimately with the universe through the imagination.

Jerome Bruner discusses the value of studying archetypal patterns and images in these terms:

> Man must cope with a relatively limited number of plights—birth, growth, loneliness, the passions, death, and not very many more. They are plights

> that are neither solved nor bypassed by being "adjusted." An adjusted man must face his passions just as surely as he faces death. I would urge that a grasp of the basic plights through the basic myths of art and literature provides the organizing principle by which knowledge of the human condition is rendered into a form that makes thinking possible, by which we go beyond learning to the use of knowledge.[13]

The above arguments in favor of the archetypal approach to the theory of literature may seem to comprise an unrealistic evaluation of the strengths of this kind of criticism for the classroom teacher. Yet I feel certain that only through such criticism can students be led to see the real power and importance of the imagination in literature and therefore in themselves. For, unlike the other three approaches to critical theory that have been discussed here, analysis by archetypes requires that the reader discover a system of metaphorical meaning within all the literature he reads if he is to become aware of "the heights and depths of what the human mind can conceive." Only by studying literature as a total structure of metaphors will students come to recognize those metaphorical constructs which generate the content of almost everything they read. It is this kind of study, then, that argues most convincingly for the importance of the imagination as an integrating agent of art and life. The major weakness of literal criticism is that by analyzing literature atomistically this argument is considerably weakened. Moreover, while formal criticism does demonstrate the thematic relationships that exist among many works of literature and thereby points to the interrelatedness of these works, the focus is usually on those connections that can be perceived through paraphrasable meaning rather than through the informing power of metaphor.

Enthusiasm for archetypal criticism must, however, be tempered by an awareness of its potential weaknesses when employed in the classroom. For instance, it is possible that, by stressing the universal story that all mythology tells, teachers as well as critics may overlook the uniqueness of individual works of literature. Moreover, unless students have had a great deal of background in biblical and classical mythology in the early grades when they are able to respond to these stories with great interest and enthusiasm, it could be very difficult to lead them to an appreciation of and an involvement in the mythical patterns of any given poem, novel, or play. Without this background, they may view archetypal criticism as a kind of sleight-of-hand or as a process of imposing extraneous structure on a self-contained unit of meaning. If

[13] Jerome B. Bruner, "Learning and Thinking" (Paper presented to Massachusetts Council on Teacher Education, February 13, 1958).

this is their attitude, then certainly they will fail to see any kind of relationship between literature and the concerns of their lives.

One definite weakness of archetypal criticism is the fact that it does not account for the historical-chronological perspective that students need if they are to understand how cultural and historical contexts influence literature and are reflected by it. Teaching the archetypal patterns created by the images of sun, flower, herb, water, sky, etc., in *The Scarlet Letter* will have limited value in helping students come to grips with the novel if, as has been said before, they know nothing of the historical development of Puritanism. The problem is one of trying to build into the sequence of a literature curriculum a delicate tension between the historical concerns of descriptive criticism and the analysis provided by other nonhistorical approaches, such as the archetypal. We have already seen how descriptive criticism might serve the best interests of formal criticism, and it would also seem possible to teach a chronological sequence which focuses on some major archetypal motifs, such as the development of the American Adam motif from its origin in the liberal-Deist tradition. Nevertheless, the solution to the problem is not a simple one, for in many cases a chronological point of view could seriously deter the teacher who is trying to illuminate the timeless, universal qualities of myth.

It is clear that all four of the approaches to critical theory which have been outlined and evaluated above have something to offer the teacher of literature. For example, while arguing strongly for the archetypal theory, one is reminded that the stress which literal criticism places on the verbal textures of the individual work as a self-contained unit of meaning can never be overlooked if students are to recognize the unique qualities of each poem, novel, and play they read. Keeping in mind that each class comes to us with its own special backgrounds and needs, it would be the worst kind of pedagogy to insist that any one approach or combination of approaches will do the best job at all times for all classes. Moreover, unless someone develops a scientific theory of literature which avoids the weaknesses of the ones briefly outlined here while retaining and perhaps extending their strengths, we must admit with Frye that a variety of critical theories can illuminate the "polysemous meaning" of literature and thereby immeasurably enrich its imaginative power for our students, as well as for ourselves.